ABSTRACT

The present invention is directed to isolated nucleic acid molecules that encode LIM mineralization protein, or LMP. The invention further provides vectors comprising nucleotide sequences that encode LMP, as well as host cells comprising those vectors. Moreover, the present invention relates to methods of inducing bone formation by transfecting osteogenic precursor cells with an isolated nucleic acid molecule comprising a nucleotide sequence encoding LIM mineralization protein. The transfection may occur *ex vivo* or *in vivo* by direct injection of virus or naked plasmid DNA. In a particular embodiment, the invention provides a method of fusing a spine by transfecting osteogenic precursor cells with an isolated nucleic acid molecule having a nucleotide sequence encoding LIM mineralization protein, admixing the transfected osteogenic precursor cells with a matrix and contacting the matrix with the spine. Finally, the invention relates to methods for inducing systemic bone formation by stable transfection of host cells with the vectors of the invention.

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